

**'SISTERS ARE DOING IT FOR THEMSELVES'
THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN SCOTLAND**

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Introduction

Twenty years on from the birth of the modern women's movement a number of feminist writers have begun to assess the character and significance of the movement, and to ask what is its future. They are writing about Britain, though virtually no reference is made to Scotland, and certainly not to the experience of Scottish feminists. This should not surprise us, and it is, in any case, surely incumbent upon us to write our own history. Nonetheless, their work makes a useful starting point, since there are many parallels in the development of women's liberation in Scotland and in the rest of Britain.

The Scottish movement arose in the same spontaneous manner, with groups focussing initially on 'consciousness-raising'. This was a process of sharing and examining our experience as women, and our understanding of ourselves, our potential, and the social and political obstacles to the development of that potential. It meant examining our personal relationships, in particular with men, and exposing the oppression perpetrated through sexual relationships, through marriage and through the domestic division of labour, and the division of labour in waged work. As the movement developed there was a proliferation and differentiation of groups, focussing around particular political positions, campaigning activities, self-help activities, consciousness raising, etc. Divisions also emerged, bitter enough to put an end to the national conferences by 1978.

The same hostility to hierarchical structures was shared by the Scottish movement, as was the insistence on organising in a way in which it was possible for all women to participate – with small groups, no leaders, no membership or delegate structure, and sharing roles such as chairing meetings and discussions. The issues which were the focus of major debates and activities have been much the same in Scotland as in the rest of Britain. Nonetheless, as this article seeks to show, the women's movement in Scotland has a distinctive Scottish identity, and a distinctive Scottish dimension. For twenty years it has been an active force in Scottish politics, and has achieved an impact far greater than is often recognised.

As yet there is very little on record about the women's movement in

Scotland and little public knowledge about its organisation, its aims, and its achievements as a movement, even though it has already altered the way many people talk and think about women's position in society. This article attempts to contribute to the process of recording the history of the contemporary women's movement in Scotland, though far more research remains to be done in order to present an adequate or full picture. In addition, it is written from the perspective of personal involvement in the women's movement, and from a particular political perspective, that of socialist feminism, and thus needs to be complemented by other accounts written from different perspectives.

The First Decade – 'Women's Liberation'

Elizabeth Wilson and Angela Weir have described the origins of the British Women's liberation movement thus, 'The British feminist movement in its renewed form in the early 1970s was originally known as "women's liberation". In the word "liberation" were encapsulated both the notions of "sexual liberation" in circulation in the 1960s and also the inspiration that western radicals, and particularly the youth and student movements, drew from the national liberation struggles of developing countries, above all that of Vietnam.'⁽¹⁾ In addition to the influence of the European revolutionary student movement, women's liberation was also influenced by feminist theory from the United States of America, which 'was more strongly based on a critique of male radicalism.'⁽²⁾

Significantly, 'Women's liberation in Britain was far more closely identified with socialism than had been the feminist movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth century.'⁽³⁾ This point is also endorsed by Beatrix Campbell and Anna Coote, who describe the influence of socialist writers such as Juliet Mitchell and Sheila Rowbotham on the development of women's liberation.⁽⁴⁾ As they point out this surge of socialist feminist thinking arose simultaneously with the militancy of women trade unionists demanding equal pay. The strike of women sewing machinists at Fords in Dagenham in 1968 was a source of inspiration for many women workers, and at the same time was an important factor in the formation of some early women's liberation groups.

The first women's groups had appeared in Britain by 1969, emerging in many places simultaneously and spontaneously. The first National Women's Liberation Conference was held at Ruskin College in Oxford in February 1970. It is not possible to pinpoint the moment of birth of the first Scottish women's liberation group, but certainly by 1970 there were groups in existence for example, in Edinburgh and St Andrews. Early groups were often made up primarily of women students – young, single, childless, middle class, and articulate. But this was not exclusively the case. For example, the majority of women in the Dundee group, formed in early 1972, were married and had children. By 1972 the Scottish women's

liberation movement was strong enough to organise its own national conference, and the first of these took place in the spring of 1972 in Glasgow. This conference, and succeeding conferences, aimed to bring women's liberation groups and individual feminists together from all over Scotland, to express solidarity with one another, and to engage in debate and discussion. There was no structure of representation or delegation, and the conferences were open to any woman to attend. It was also open to any woman to give a paper, or hold a workshop. There were usually plenary sessions to give feedback from workshops, and on occasion to pass resolutions, though the Scottish conferences did not adopt any demands separate from those adopted at British conferences. The following year the second conference was held, again in Glasgow. At this conference a decision was taken to set up a Scottish Women's Liberation Workshop, and a Scottish Women's Liberation Newsletter, as by this time there were already several local newsletters in existence. The Scottish Women's Liberation Workshop was housed in the basement of the home of a North American feminist in Edinburgh's Royal Terrace, and was used as a base, primarily by women's groups in Edinburgh for several years.

In 1974 the National (British) Women's Liberation Conference was held in Edinburgh in that institution which had once produced Miss Jean Brodie's 'creme de la creme' of Edinburgh womanhood, James Gillespie's High School. The impact of the conference on women's groups in Scotland was considerable. The Dundee Women's Liberation Group, of which the author was a founding member, was already beginning to discover that sisterhood alone was not enough, and that different political perspectives and class allegiances could still divide. This discovery was reinforced by the experience of the Edinburgh conference, where we found ourselves surrounded by a furious eruption of arguments. Most significantly what the 1974 conference represented was the arrival centre stage of the issue of sexual orientation, which was to prove divisive in various ways in the following years. It also saw the surfacing of bitter divisions in political perspectives, such as that between socialist feminists and the Wages for Housework campaign. This was perhaps best personified in the heated and vituperative debate between Selma James and Beatrix Campbell over the correct position to take on the strike of women workers at Imperial Typewriters. The euphoria of the first wave of sisterhood was wearing off, and in its place was to come increasingly bitter division. Our response as a group was to concentrate our efforts in new directions, leaving behind 'consciousness raising' as the primary form of our activity. For some of us the new directions took the form of membership of left wing parties, at least for a time, and for others it took the form of concentrating on campaigns that might have a practical, as well as ideological impact, such as Women's Aid. To what extent this experience was typical is impossible to say without further research. But the conference did seem to mark the start of a new phase. Some feminists in Scotland enthusiastically embraced the ideas of lesbian and radical feminism which they encountered at the conference.

Others put their energies into campaigning – for women's centres, women's refuges, childcare facilities, legal changes, equal pay, better health facilities for women, and so on.

By 1974 the Women's Liberation Movement had adopted a number of demands. The first four of these were adopted at the second National Women's Liberation Conference at Skegness in 1971, and were for equal pay for equal work; equal opportunities and equal education; free contraception and abortion on demand; and free twenty four hour childcare. At the Edinburgh conference two further demands were put on the agenda and subsequently adopted. These were for legal and financial independence for all women, and for an end to all discrimination against lesbians and for the right of women to determine their own sexual orientation. Finally, in 1978 the seventh demand was adopted, at the last national conference in Birmingham. It was for freedom for all women from violence, or the threat of violence, and sexual coercion, regardless of marital status, and for an end to all laws, assumptions and institutions that perpetuate male dominance and men's aggression towards women.

Around these demands there proliferated a variety of groups, focussing around either a particular campaigning activity, including Women's Aid, the National Abortion Campaign, the Legal and Financial Independence Campaign – or focussing around activities such as consciousness-raising, or around a particular political identity, primarily either socialist feminist or radical (also known as 'revolutionary') feminist. As the groups proliferated many began to form their own networks, on a Scottish basis or a British basis, or both. A brief summary of political positions is inevitably crude and simplistic, but roughly speaking socialist feminists believed that their politics had to address class divisions as well as women's oppression by men, and that women should engage in class and labour movement politics with men, whilst continuing to challenge sexism. By contrast radical feminists believed the division between men and women to be the primary division in society, and that the task of feminists was to overthrow patriarchy. Whilst radical and socialist feminism sometimes overlapped, many radical feminists rejected all existing political institutions and parties, and labour movement organisations, etc, as being the product of a specifically male way of organising and thinking, and therefore inherently hostile and oppressive to women. For some women this led to separatism – an attempt to create a life free of contact with men.

Also in the mid seventies there was a move towards setting up women's centres, in the first place to provide premises for meetings for groups, whose membership was often rapidly growing to the point where it was no longer possible to meet in each other's houses, or to the point where other premises, such as the offices of voluntary organisations or trades councils, could no longer meet the demand. It was also hoped that the existence of a women's centre in any particular city or town would draw large numbers of

women into the movement through being an accessible and identifiable point of contact. However, this latter hope was never fulfilled, and the failure of the centres to attract large numbers of new women was the subject both of much soul-searching and much argument.

The Glasgow Women's Centre first opened in 1976, and in its first few years even employed workers, firstly through MSC job creation schemes, and then through a research grant from the Equal Opportunities Commission. The Centre survived a change of premises from one side of Miller Street to the other, before closing its doors finally about two years ago. (The site is now being developed as part of central Glasgow's continuing reconstruction as a temple to the values of aspiring Thatcherite entrepreneurs.) The Edinburgh Women's Centre first opened in 1977 at premises in Fountainbridge, and some years later moved to Broughton Street, where it still is. In the late seventies a group which grew out of Women's Aid in Dundee opened 'A Woman's Place', a centre for women, in Whitfield, one of Dundee's larger peripheral estates. More recently there has been a renewal of interest in setting up a women's centre in Maryhill in Glasgow, following the community based model of Whitfield, rather than the city centre based model of Edinburgh and Glasgow.

The Scottish Women's Liberation Conferences continued to be held annually (in 1977 there were two conferences, one in May in Aberdeen, and one in December in St Andrews), like the British conferences, until 1978. The last two Scottish conferences, at St Andrews in December 1977, and in Edinburgh in September 1978, introduced a new format of block workshops, randomly allocated, to attempt to ensure that all women present discussed the same topics. At St Andrews the issues discussed were separatism, the socialist current within the women's movement, and violence. In Edinburgh the workshop themes were consciousness-raising, growing old together, and class attitudes. This format encouraged women with different perspectives to talk to each other and sometimes to discover that 'often there wasn't much of a split between those who called themselves names such as "radical feminist" and "socialist feminist"'.⁽⁵⁾ But as the same writer reported, 'there seems to be a growing intolerance of women who live differently and think differently, so we get the situation in St Andrews where most of the separatists – who live apart from men – held their own discussions throughout the conference, because they didn't find it useful to discuss things with women who "still" relate to men'.⁽⁶⁾

Despite the fact that two hundred women were expected at this conference, only ninety turned up, and by September 1978 only just over sixty women were prepared to participate in a Scottish Women's Liberation Conference. After this, as with the British conferences, no group offered to organise another one. Recently, however, Scottish Women's Liberation Conferences have revived. The first of these was held in Glasgow in September 1987, and the second in Edinburgh in April 1989.

At the 1976 conference in Glasgow a proposal was put forward by the author of this article, to create a Scottish feminist publication, and an editorial collective was formed. The first issue of the '*Scottish Women's Liberation Journal*' was launched in May 1977 at the conference in Aberdeen. It was put together by a collective of nine women, with the assistance of several others. Whilst the majority had a socialist feminist perspective, this was not true for all, nor was there any insistence on the adoption of a particular line. Some women were interested as writers of fiction and poetry, as well as of political articles, but the unifying factor was a wish to create a vehicle for debate on the experience of women in Scotland. The collective was, however, completely open, and its composition soon changed. Within a relatively short period of time the divisions within the women's movement were reproduced within the collective running the *Journal* and a group from the original collective broke away to found *Msprint*. This group held a socialist feminist perspective, and, as they stated in the pages of *Msprint* they particularly wished to develop an analysis of the situation of women in Scotland, and to formulate a programme of action appropriate to the Scottish political situation.

The contents and the lists of contacts and groups from both the *Scottish Women's Liberation Journal* and *Msprint* give an indication of the proliferation of feminist activity in Scotland in the second half of the seventies. During the period there was feminist activity from Shetland to the Borders, with a large number of feminist groups existing in the cities, particularly Edinburgh and Glasgow. By the time *Msprint* was being produced – August 1978 – there were forty to fifty groups being listed. The groups covers a wide range of activities – Women's Centres, women's newsletters, student groups, lesbian feminist groups, childcare groups, women and health groups, women's studies, consciousness-raising groups, National Abortion Campaign groups, Women in the Scottish Assembly, Women's Voice, Women's Legal and Financial Independence Campaign, Women's Aid, Women in Media, sexuality groups, Scarlet Woman (socialist feminist newsletter), Scottish Convention of Women, Working Women's Charter, women's theatre, political discussion groups, Rape Crisis Centres, Women in Science, Women in Manual Trades, writers' groups, Stramullion (Scottish feminist publishers), and women's bands.⁽⁷⁾

Groups ranged from those concerned primarily with personal consciousness and identity, and lifestyles, to those who wished to campaign for political, legal and practical changes to improve the lives of women. Whilst there were often tensions between those who saw personal relationships and lifestyle as having pre-eminence, and those who felt it was essential to engage in a wider political process to attempt to effect changes in the lives of all women, it would be a mistake to regard these positions as mutually exclusive. Nor was there necessarily a dichotomy between these

views. Each could be seen as aiming at 'revolutionary' change, though there were disagreements about the form that revolution should take and the steps that were necessary to achieve it. The complexity of these positions has not always been understood, as for example, when Maggie Sinclair writes of socialist feminists that 'Sexual politics and the transformation of personal relationships were not on their agenda and they argued strongly that the only way forward for women was to work with men through the organised labour movement to improve conditions for everyone'.⁽⁸⁾ This is simply wrong. Not only is it not true that sexual politics were not on the agenda of socialist feminists, it is also the case that socialist feminists recognised perfectly clearly that it was necessary for women to organise autonomously, as well as to engage in struggles within political parties and trades unions on behalf of women and also on behalf of the working class. Thus many socialist feminists fought, and continue to fight, on all fronts simultaneously.

Another common misconception is that the radical feminist/socialist feminist split reflected a split between lesbian and heterosexual women. It is true that some lesbian feminist women took a separatist position and argued that all feminists should become lesbians as a political choice. Further they accused women who worked with men politically or had relationships with men of collaborating with the enemy. This naturally made communication between certain sections of the movement virtually impossible. However, by no means all lesbians took this view. As Beatrix Campbell and Anna Coote point out, 'lesbians did not all think men were the enemy, any more than heterosexual women all thought men were ideal comrades and life partners. A considerable number of heterosexuals espoused the radical feminist cause, while many lesbians were committed socialist feminists.'⁽⁹⁾

By the end of the seventies, despite the divisions, diversity and diffuseness of the women's liberation movement in Scotland, it had grown to a movement involving hundreds, if not thousands, of women throughout Scotland. Given the structure of the women's movement, a structure with no formal membership, and consisting of a loose networking of groups and individuals, it is impossible to say how many women were actively involved. Nor, without further research, is it possible to make a reasonable estimate. Many women who were campaigning for legal changes, for better provision of services affecting women, for resources to organise self-help facilities such as refuges and rape crisis centres – for changes within political organisations and institutions, and for better representation for women – and were also struggling to make changes in personal relationships with other women, with their children, and with men. It still felt like a growing, developing movement, with enormous potential.

The Scottish Dimension and the response to the devolution debate

The end of the seventies also saw the defeat of the campaign for devolution with the failure of the referendum to produce a big enough 'Yes' vote. For the women's movement this defeat also had significance, even if at the time the issue had seemed marginal to feminism. *Msp* commented that 'On the whole the women's movement ignored the referendum or saw it as irrelevant.' This attitude was attributed to the following factors, 'There is still a great deal of confusion as to precisely what the Assembly's powers would be and how these might affect the lives of women in Scotland. Secondly, many women believe that bodies like an assembly would do nothing to change the position of women in society.'⁽¹⁰⁾ But, perhaps most importantly, the attempt to develop an analysis and a body of knowledge concerning women's history and experience in Scotland was still in its infancy.

Nonetheless, by the mid seventies some feminists in Scotland had marked out the necessity of women in Scotland understanding their own particular history and experience and of developing their own political practice. For example, the *Scottish Women's Liberation Journal* and its successor *Msp*, had as their explicit aim the development of a Scottish based understanding, analysis, and political programme. Women campaigning for legal changes, and for better provision for women, whether in childcare, refuges for battered women, or abortion facilities, also had to develop their own demands that related to specifically Scottish laws and institutions, as well as taking part in UK wide campaigns.

In the run-up to the referendum on devolution the women's Legal and Financial Independence Campaign worked hard on preparing a charter for legislative reform, that addressed the areas in which the Assembly would have powers. The *Scottish Women's Charter*, sub-titled 'proposals designed to extend women's control over their lives', covered areas such as divorce, financial provision and custody; housing; abortion, contraception, and maternity services; childcare; and violence against women. Being prepared for devolution did not necessarily mean that feminists campaigned for it. Indeed, the Legal and Financial Independence Group refused, as a group of feminists, to adopt a stance either for or against devolution. There was a range of opinion on devolution from those who wanted to take a public stance in favour, to those who were afraid that with regard to the impact on women's lives, a Scottish Assembly might prove more reactionary than a Parliament at Westminster.

There was, of course, some evidence for this. If, on the one hand, it was David Steel who introduced the Abortion Act of 1967 to Parliament, it was James White, and later John Corrie, who tried to repeal it. Whilst the East of Scotland provided good abortion facilities, and Aberdeen in particular even before the 1967 Act, the West of Scotland was notoriously bad. The influence of the Catholic vote on Labour Party policy and behaviour was naturally a cause for concern. Legislation that was of benefit

to women inevitably took longer to be passed in Scotland. This was partly because 'the British parliament has not allocated parliamentary time to make essential legislation for what they consider a mere region of the country.'⁽¹¹⁾ It was also partly because of resistance by Scots MPs, the Scottish legal profession, and Scottish local authorities. For example, reform of the divorce law to make divorce possible on the grounds of irretrievable breakdown happened several years after it had taken place in England and Wales, and it took even longer for divorce to be partially wrested from the hands of the Court of Session, and to thus become for those to whom the appropriate conditions applied a genuinely simple and cheap process. Likewise, legislation affording greater protection to battered women, by providing interdicts with powers of arrest, and by granting exclusion orders against violent partners, followed slowly after reform in England and Wales. Women were not well represented within Scottish political parties, nor in the unions, despite in the latter case, their rapidly growing membership throughout the seventies.⁽¹²⁾ It was only in 1981 that the STUC finally agreed to the creation of women's seats on the General Council, whereas the TUC had had women's seats since 1921. Thus the anxiety that a Scottish Assembly would be less responsive even than the British parliament to women's demands was justifiable.

In early 1980 a conference was held in Glasgow to debate the proposals contained in the *Scottish Women's Charter*. This was well attended and stimulating even if it was like shutting the door after the horse had bolted. And if it was not possible to campaign for the whole *Charter* by pressurising a Scottish based Assembly, it was still possible for various campaign groups to campaign for changes relevant to their particular interest. Thus, a number of the demands in the Charter have been achieved. In particular, the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act of 1977 and the Matrimonial Homes (Family Protection)(Scotland) Act of 1981 have enhanced women's right of access to housing; greater legal protection is now available to battered women; and both law and practice in relation to rape victims has changed to give a more sympathetic treatment than existed before. Radical proposals for divorce law reform and a state childcare allowance, which were contained in the Charter, have dropped out of sight, whilst childcare provision and health services have deteriorated due to the Thatcherite onslaught on the welfare state⁽¹³⁾, though attitudes towards working mothers and to abortion and contraception are generally more favourable.

The response to Thatcherism

The mid to the late seventies saw a growing focus on Scottish issues and Scottish experience by the women's movement in Scotland. This may have only involved a minority of feminist activists, but it was a significant one. The failure of the referendum and the advent of Thatcherism put a brake on this development. In retrospect the advent of the Tory government in May 1979 seems like a watershed. Of course it was clear that it was a significant

political change. What was not clear was how people might react to it and what political realignments it might produce. The Women's Liberation Movement was already going through a process of fragmentation and diffusion. The Tory victory served perhaps to accelerate that diffusion. It certainly had an important influence on the directions women moved in, and the political choices they were presented with. Like most feminists in Britain, most Scottish feminists were dismayed by Mrs Thatcher's election victory in 1979. In the issue following the election *Msprint's* editorial opened with the following lines, 'In May this year the first woman Prime Minister in Britain came into office. It is truly ironic that the improvements in women's position in society and more progressive attitudes towards women have played their part in Mrs Thatcher's success. It may indeed prove tragic for women in Britain, for Margaret Thatcher leads the most viciously reactionary government to be seen in this country for a long time.'⁽¹⁴⁾ It ended with this call to action, 'Tory attacks threaten not merely to halt the progress of women towards liberation, but to strip them of the gains made in the past decade, and to place an almost intolerable burden on a Women's Liberation Movement already fighting sexism on many fronts. Women must make their voices heard through the Women's Movement, and through the trade union movement, through political organisations, and through pressure groups. We must fight back in every possible way.'⁽¹⁵⁾ In the intervening years the women's movement has experienced a diffusion, but also has developed new forms. It has undergone a metamorphosis from 'women's liberation' into 'feminism', a gradual replacement in terminology, which 'indicated an insensibly changing perspective, as the movement moved towards a more restricted, more "realistic" and less "revolutionary" orientation'.⁽¹⁶⁾ But in many ways women did take up the struggle against the right wing challenge of Thatcherism.

Perhaps most significantly, in terms of the changes in the ways in which both the left and the women's movement have organised, the Tory victory put the question of whether or not to join the Labour Party on the agenda for many who would not have previously considered it. This was true for feminists, for non-aligned socialists, and even for left wing parties, as, for example, in the case of the International Marxist Group who took the decision to enter the Labour Party en masse. In the words of Kate Phillips, 'Feminists rapidly regrouped, the women's movement was in temporary disarray, so we took our feminist ideas into community groups, trade unions and the Labour Party. For some of us it meant back to the organisations we had left some years before. But we went with other women and with shared understandings about women's needs and how to defend them.'⁽¹⁷⁾

This process of regrouping was also reflected in the pages of *Msprint*, which continued to be published until 1981. In contrast to the wider range of topics covered in earlier issues, by 1981 there were two main themes.

These were violence against women – including domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, sexual abuse, incest and pornography – and women's role in organised activity within the labour movement and political parties, which with reference to Scotland meant either the Labour Party or the SNP. If the women's movement was in disarray and was no longer visible in the same way as a movement, that did not mean that feminism was no longer a political force. Rather it took different forms. The generation of feminists who had come of age politically in the seventies took their feminism into political parties, into trade unions, into their working lives, and into the continuing transformation of personal relationships. For some, feminist organisations themselves provided employment, as well as a vehicle for social and political change. For others feminist research was the chosen path. The peace movement, too, was greatly influenced by feminism, and owed much of its resurgence to the inspiration provided by the women's peace camps at Greenham Common and Faslane. Women peace activist, in turn, came to feminism through their experience as women in the peace movement. Women have made a concerted effort to defend and extend their rights. They have organised an 'inventive, articulate and absolutely vital campaign of opposition to Thatcherism over the last ten years.'⁽¹⁸⁾

The achievements of the Women's Movement in Scotland

In this time much more has been achieved than is often recognised. For example, 'Legally there have been some important changes for women, particularly in the area of family law.'⁽¹⁹⁾ Women who suffer violence from their partners can have them removed from the house. Women now have the legal right to occupy the marital home. 'Divorce is now cheaper and easier for most people, and the financial settlement fairer to both parties.'⁽²⁰⁾ The law on rape has changed so that victims are no longer questioned in court about their sexual history, and police forces are taking a more sympathetic approach. However, as Eveline Hunter notes, 'Most important of all, perhaps, is that there are now more organisations to help women or children who have suffered sexual or physical violence'.⁽²¹⁾

Some of these legal changes can be said to be the product of a wider change in mores, of which the women's movement was a part, e.g. liberalisation of divorce laws. Other changes are much more directly the result of feminist campaigning, for example, those affecting domestic violence and rape. The Abortion Act of 1967 pre-dated the women's movement, if only just, but its preservation subsequently became the focus of a series of hard fought feminist campaigns. Other legal changes such as the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts came about partly as the result of the struggles of women workers, and partly as the result of entry to the EEC. They have in turn become the basis for feminist campaigning, which has broadened the scope of the Equal Pay Act, and has put issues such as sexual harassment on the agenda of the labour movement.

To a large extent, however, the economic climate has undermined the efficacy of the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts, both of which in any case were very limited pieces of legislation. Women's situation at work in relation to men's in terms of occupational segregation and disparities in average pay has therefore seen little change. Women's average pay remains about two-thirds of men's. Their union membership has continued to increase, and their position within the labour movement has been strengthened, albeit at a time when the labour movement as a whole has suffered a series of vicious attacks. The women's movement has been an important influence on this development. As Yvonne Strachan and Lesley Sutherland put it, 'Women have come to demand more from their unions, in terms of recognition of their status and a responsiveness to their needs as women workers. This development is linked to the growth of the women's movement and feminism together with the movements for equality and civil rights.'⁽²²⁾ This new political confidence gave rise to tremendously effective organisation of political and financial support for the miners' strike by women in the mining communities, although they were not themselves union members. Indeed, 'So successful was the organisation of women that in many areas it was their support which sustained the strike.'⁽²³⁾ As a result of this support the Scottish Area of the NUM agreed to women's demand for associate membership. In the bitter aftermath of the strike's defeat it is perhaps all too easy to forget the impact it had on the women involved. Angela Weir and Elizabeth Wilson have pointed out that 'The 10,000 women who marched in the "Women Against Pit Closures" march on 11 August 1984 were participating in the biggest women's demonstration held in Britain since the suffragettes,'⁽²⁴⁾ though, of course, mixed demonstrations on feminist issues, especially abortion rights, have involved much larger numbers.

In recent years a number of women's committees and equal opportunities committees have been created within Scottish local authorities, and 'it goes without saying that the major thrust behind their being set up in the first place has been the impact of the women's movement.'⁽²⁵⁾ Women's committees have taken up issues such as childcare, health, violence, low pay, employment, training and leisure facilities, as well as offering support to women's organisations in the community. The development and the work of the women's committees have not been without problems. They are asked to tackle a wide range of issues with inadequate resources, and do not always have the wholehearted support of the councils who have set them up. They have usually resulted from manifesto commitments supported by the membership (all existing Women's Committees in Scotland are in Labour authorities) and are not necessarily fully supported by the ruling group. Nonetheless they have made gains for women, and they are on the increase in Scotland. At the time of writing there were eight women's committees, and four equal opportunities committees in Scotland.

Feminist organisations such as Women's Aid have continued to expand throughout the eighties. There are now thirty-seven Women's Aid groups in Scotland and a growing number of refuges are being set up the length and breadth of Scotland. The number of Rape Crisis Centres, likewise, has increased and now stands at six. Indeed, it is the section of the women's movement which campaigns against violence against women which appears to have had the most cohesion throughout the eighties, and it was this section which revived the Scottish Women's Liberation Conferences, through organising a conference in September 1987 in Glasgow.

The aim of the conference was to bring together women working against violence against women whether in organisations or individually to share and improve ways of working, to make links and to plan future strategies. It was attended by over 260 women, and as the organisers have commented, 'conference participants did seem to represent a cross-section of the Women's Liberation Movement in Scotland.'⁽²⁶⁾ Not only were there many women present who had already been engaged in feminist activity for some time, there were also women working in professions where they dealt with the effects of violence against women and/or children, and there were also women from incest survivors groups, other self-help groups, and community groups. This represented both a widening and a renewing of feminism in Scotland. For older feminists some of the discussions gave a distinct sense of *deja vu*, and if the excitement of women discovering ideas was encouraging, it also suggested the need for the movement to create a means of communicating its history, and of communicating the knowledge that has already been gained through almost twenty years of action and debate.

In April 1989, the second of the 'new wave' conferences was held in Edinburgh. The conference aimed to 'create a new momentum for the women's movement in Scotland by moving beyond the divisions of the past to re-establish a broad feminist network round the country.'⁽²⁷⁾ It was attended by around two hundred women, and centred on the topics of women and violence, and women and the state. It did not appear to draw in to anything like the same extent as the previous one had either the 'old guard' of the Scottish Women's Liberation Movement, nor the activists and workers from feminist organisations. It did however seem to succeed in drawing in more women through community activists networks, unemployed centres, etc, and therefore to be drawing in more working class women. The conference identified the pressing need for contact and information and agreed to set up a women's newsletter. It also resolved to take action on violence against women and to organise 'Reclaim the Night' marches throughout Scotland on 11th November 1989. Whilst this second conference seemed to have appealed to a somewhat different constituency than the previous one, like the 1987 conference, it indicated a resurgence of interest in feminist ideas in Scotland, a desire for better communication,

and a desire to act as a united movement.

There are, of course, still many feminist groups in existence in Scotland, some of which have been going since the early seventies, and others of more recent origin. There are the organisations such as Women's Aid, Rape Crisis Centres, Women's Centres, and National Abortion Campaign groups, and there are black feminist groups, women's health groups, lesbian feminist groups, consciousness raising groups and so on. They may not be as visible and as readily identifiable as in the mid to late seventies but they exist. In addition to avowedly feminist groups there are a number of groupings which also campaign consistently on women's issues e.g. the Scottish Convention of Women, and the Scottish Joint Action Group. With both these there is overlapping and linking up with feminist organisations.⁽²⁸⁾

More recently a group has formed to demand 'A Woman's Claim of Right in Scotland'. The campaign was inspired by the setting up of the constitutional convention, and it is a cross-party campaign including women from the Labour Party, the Democrats, the SNP and the Greens, and also including women with no party affiliation. The general aim of the campaign is to strengthen the participation of women in all areas of Scottish public life. Clearly, both the influence of the women's movement, and the campaign for devolution, have contributed to the formation of this group, though it seems to owe more to political party activists than to feminist activists. At the time of writing it is too early to say whether the 'Women's Claim of Right' campaign might provide a significant force to unite women in Scotland, or whether it will be just another grouping working in parallel with the others that already exist. Nor is it clear to what extent the group might have a feminist agenda rather than simply one of women's rights. A feminist agenda would challenge the sexual division of labour at work and in the home, and seek to create facilities and resources that would enable these divisions to be broken down. It would also challenge the ways in which male violence is socially constructed, and would oppose the forms this violence takes, and would demand a continuing reappraisal and reconstruction of personal relationships. In many respects this is precisely the agenda that was developed by the Women's Liberation Movement, which despite the movement's achievements, remains relevant to the 1990s.

The current political situation in Scotland provides an opportunity for a resurgent feminism to organise anew and to act more effectively on political institutions and ideologies. This is partly a result of the renewed and growing interest in devolution/independence, which, amongst other things, has brought Scottish political institutions under greater scrutiny as attempts to create new ones are being made, and has focussed attention on the meaning of Scottish identity and experience, including that of Scottish women. It is also partly a result of the cumulative experience and

achievements of two decades of feminism. It also seems to be the case that contemporary feminism in Scotland is more rooted in Scottish experience, in that the re-establishment of the conferences is an indigenous phenomenon, and not related to any parallel development in England and Wales. The conferences have also broadened the base of the movement to include move community activists and working class women. To a certain extent these developments are building on previous work and campaigns which had a distinctive Scottish dimension, whether this took the form of a Scottish network, as in the case of Women's Aid, or the National Abortion Campaign, or a Scottish focus for campaigning activity such as that of the Legal and Financial Independence Campaign in Scotland, which addressed itself to Scottish laws and legal institutions. In addition much of the work coming to fruition in areas of feminist research, such as Scottish women's history, has been carried out by women who defined the Scottish dimension as having major significance over ten years ago. The constitutional crisis with which Scotland is faced has brought this dimension more to the fore.

Conclusion

In Scotland at present possibilities are opening up for women to have a greater voice and greater representation. Women have succeeded in gaining greater representation within the trade union movement. Local authority women's and equal opportunities committees have also provided a vehicle for women's demands to be expressed. This is an ongoing process and is likely to lead to greater involvement of women in decision making bodies within the labour movement and local government. In addition, the debate on devolution and regional autonomy has given rise to a demand for adequate representation of women in a future Assembly, a demand which surely must be impossible to ignore. Also opening up is the possibility of feminism as a political force strengthening its influence. Whether it will succeed in doing so remains to be seen. To date, the women's movement in Scotland has had a substantial impact, both in practical and in ideological terms. However, its impact has been weakest at the economic level, which is fundamental. As Elizabeth Wilson and Angela Weir put it, 'While women's right to equality is increasingly (if grudgingly) recognised, the material basis for equality and independence is denied.'⁽²⁹⁾ The movement's influence on political parties and institutions has been slow to take effect, though there is increasing evidence of change. The diffuseness and diversity of the women's movement has often been a strength, through allowing it to embrace a wide range of opinion and action, and through encouraging an active and democratic participation. But it can also be a weakness, through lack of effective communication and mass mobilisation. The contemporary women's movement in Scotland is, in historical terms, very young. To realise its potential it needs to acquire the maturity of a greater consciousness of itself, a knowledge of its own history, and a better means of expression for its ideas and political demands, and it also needs to concentrate those demands on the areas which are most fundamental to the

maintenance of women's disadvantaged position in society. But, whatever direction feminism takes, it is sufficiently vital to flatly contradict the description of contemporary society as 'post-feminist'. How feminism in Scotland will move forward is hard to predict, but it will certainly not go away.

Esther Breitenbach, Manager of Community Business Grampian Ltd, Willowbank House, Willowbank Road, Aberdeen.

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3. *Ibid*. p.75.
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26. *Report on the Scottish Women's Liberation Conference 1987 - Working Against Violence Against Women*, p.5.
27. 'Getting it Together', *Radical Scotland* No.38 April/May 1989.
28. The Scottish Joint Action Group was set up to organise a series of events throughout Scotland in 1985 to mark the end of the United Nations Decade for Women, and it has continued to exist to lobby for the demands agreed through the UN conferences on women's rights and status.
29. Angela Weir and Elizabeth Wilson, *op cit*, p.102.